

WRITING STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL ESL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN WRITING CLASSROOM

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Received on 31 March 2020 / Approved on 9 April 2020

ABSTRACT

The study examined the writing strategies used by undergraduate students in the ESL writing classroom. Three strategies were involved in the writing process which was; pre-writing strategies, while writing strategies and revising strategies. Specifically, the objectives were; (1) to examine the student's preferred strategies of successful and unsuccessful ESL students in the writing process. In this cross-sectional study, 50 undergraduate ESL students from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) were the targeted sample for this study. Three strategies of the writing process; pre-writing, while writing and revising were measured via a standard questionnaire that adapted from previous studies. The data obtained were analyzed by using the software of Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The findings of this study indicated ESL students have preferred planning strategies then while writing strategies and revising strategies. Meanwhile, the findings of this study will have significant implications for ESL undergraduate students in their writing. Contributions, limitations, and implications of the study are also discussed.

Keywords: writing process, ESL, strategies

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji strategi penulisan yang digunakan oleh pelajar sarjana dalam kelas ESL. Tiga strategi yang terlibat dalam proses penulisan adalah; strategi perancangan, strategi ketika menulis dan strategi menyemak. Objektif kajian ini secara khususnya adalah; (1) untuk mengkaji strategi pilihan pelajar ESL yang berjaya dan tidak berjaya dalam proses penulisan. Sampel kajian ini diambil daripada 50 orang pelajar sarjana bagi kelas ESL dari Universiti Sultan Idris (UPSI). Instrumen soal selidik standar digunakan menerusi tiga aspek proses penulisan berikut. Data yang diperolehi, dianalisis menggunakan perisian Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Menerusi hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar ESL lebih suka strategi perancangan berbanding strategi ketika menulis dan strategi menyemak. Sementara itu juga, hasil kajian ini juga memberi implikasi dan sumbangan terhadap pelajar dalam menilai kekuatan serta implikasi penulisan mereka.

Kata Kunci: proses menulis, ESL, strategi

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the main language skills and plays a role in expressing an individual opinion, ideas, thoughts, and attitudes. People are capable of sharing ideas, feelings and convincing others through the writing of one individual or more people. Writing is one of the important skills for

university students to master in sequence to achieve academic results and get a better job opportunity (Raoofi, Binandeh, and Rahmani, 2017). Writing skills is important for learners in the university. The key areas of writing directly to ideas, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting thus, ESL learners should practice regularly on their writing (Ien, Yunus, and

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Embi, 2017). Writing is one of the key language skills and it plays an important role in conveying individual ideas, thoughts, and opinions (Alfaki, 2015). Academic writing is essential for learners of tertiary education in Malaysia and undergraduates are anticipated to have the required language skills to create writing (Fatimawati, 2017). According to (Rao, 2018) writing is very important because communication is conveyed through writing so students need efficient writing skills to meet their academic requirements.

Learners of the second language have to master in writing to do well in their courses specifically at the university or college level of education (Seong Pek and Mee Mee, 2016). Davoudi, Mohammad, and Adel (2015) stated writing strategies are the most important because language would be effective based on what learners learn while learning the language. Writing skill is important for the future academic and career path of the learners (Karki, 2019). An effective classroom teaching targeted for progressing writing would show to be primarily important and challenges they come across in various contexts deserve significance for research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the preferred strategy used by the undergraduate ESL students in their writing and create a research repository on this topic.

Problem Statement

Writing is important for students because it helps students to understand ideas and concepts well (Shrestha, Pahari, and Awasthi, 2017). In an academic principle, essays have the main aim of presenting ideas and necessary features in a western university. Writing skills is not easy to master particularly in the second language (L2) specifically for ESL learners (Fatimawati, 2017). Writing is reflected as an important ability for production of knowledge and it is a part of the assessment for students achievement in academic that relies on their ability to deliver information which helps the students to do their assignments (Raoofi et al., 2017).

Research Questions

This research is carried out to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the student's preferred strategies of successful and unsuccessful ESL students in the writing process?

Research Objectives

The research is targeted to identify the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the student's preferred strategies of successful and unsuccessful ESL students in the writing process?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing Process

Writing is referring to making sense of 'how can I express what I think until I understand what I communicate?' (Learn, 2009). The difficult task for second learners is to acquire writing skills and second language learners face all the language skills which influence their proficiency in writing (Hussain, 2017). According to (Widya & Pornpimol, 2018) the first component of writing is described as a process that includes prewriting, drafting, editing and publishing which guides a learner to provide a section of writing.

The writing process has become the core in ESL writing and the lecturers assist the student's development in written drafts with feedback specified for further progress (Hemadevi, Paramaswari, & Fauzilah, 2013). The writing process is influential Flower and Hayes's theory of writing which explains writing as a repetitive rather than direct process (Petric and Czarl, 2003). It is also emphasized the writing process into three components which include planning, translating ideas and reviewing the text. A current traditional pedagogy developed into the process approach which is the most essential ideas were writing is the insight of meaning and also is a process that can be divided into stages such as prewriting, drafting, feedback, revising, and editing

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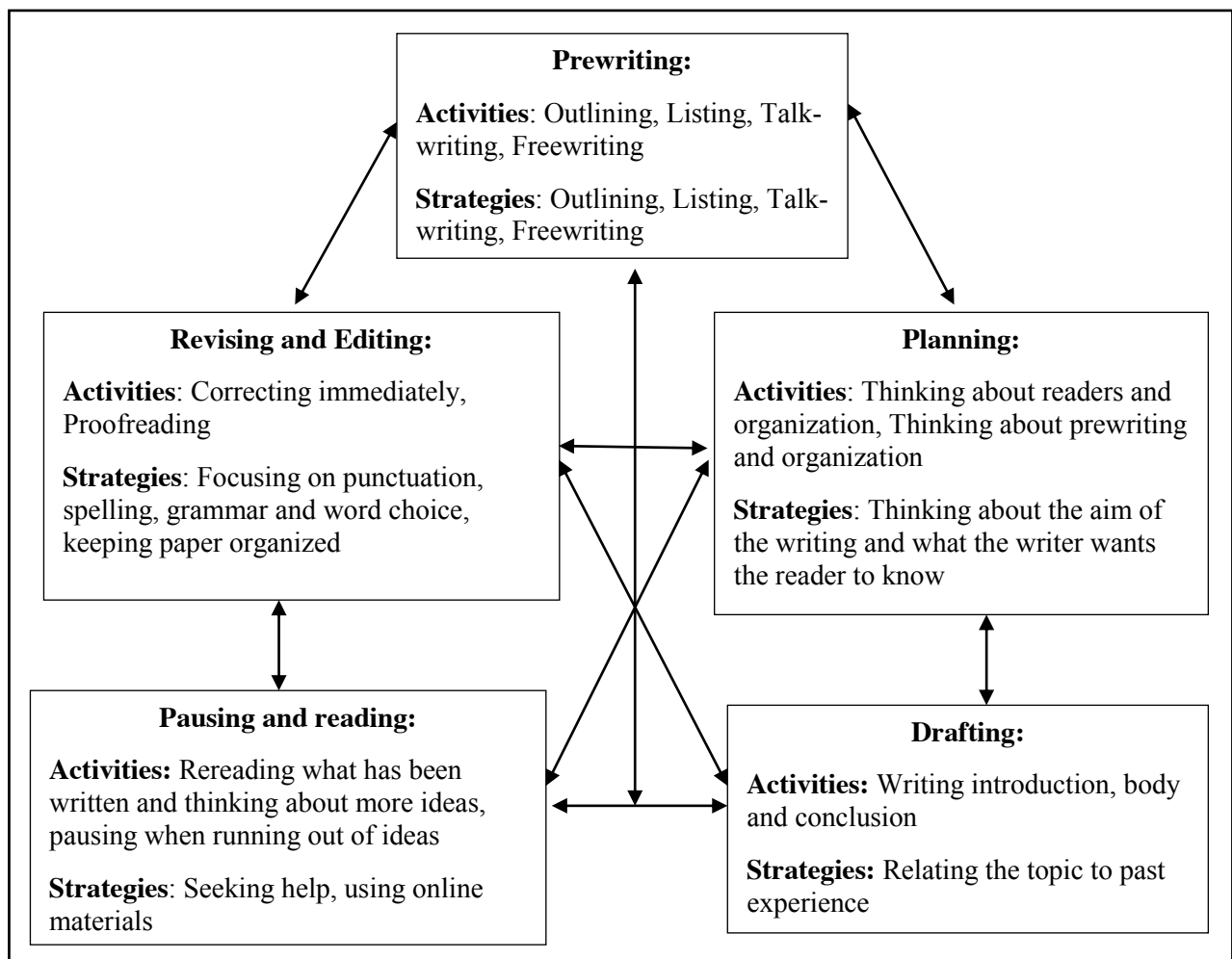
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(Atkinson, 2018). The writing process involves how writers develop and create ideas before finalized the actual write up (Zamel, 2007).

According to Abas and Abd Aziz (2018), the model of the writing process and writing strategies (Figure 1) shows the participants used numerous strategies at each

stage of the writing process such as prewriting stage, outlining, listing and freewriting. Five stages were found in the writing process; 1) prewriting, 2) planning, 3) drafting, 4) pausing and reading, and revising and editing which consisted of different strategies (Abas and Abd Aziz, 2018).

Figure 1. Writing Process and Writing Strategies Model Proposed



Note: Data derived from Abas and Abd Aziz (2018)

According to the above writing process start at the prewriting stage such as outlining, listing, talk writing, and freewriting were used. The learners continued with the planning stages and strategies such as

captivating the reader into concerns. Then, the drafting stage, where the learners started to draft their ideas or points into a paragraph besides strategies such as linking the topic to previous experience happened at this stage.

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Next, the pausing and reading stage occurred when the learners silent for a moment to read what they had written and when a lack of ideas while strategies such as seeking help and using online material were used at this stage. Besides, revising and editing occurred when they paused and read, strategies such as focusing on the process of writing and text arrangement that required addition and removing ideas to be completed at this stage (Abas and Abd Aziz, 2018).

“Prewriting” is the stage before words develop on paper, “writing” is the stage in which ideas being formed and “rewriting” is a final modification of that idea (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The writing process highlights cognitive thinking processes that may be used to write drafts before developing into a written work (Hemadevi et al., 2013). Writers regularly use the process of pre-writing, rewriting and write hence, pre-writing has improved the teaching of a structure by planning for the writing process effectively (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The other phases of planning stages of the Hayes and Flower writing model include organizing by generating procedure into writing and it is also including constructing information in an organized, and logical (Peng et al., 2013). Second language learners transfer their writing from their mother tongue to their writing in a second language and the few studies have surveyed the use writing strategies by university students in the classroom (Raofi et al., 2017).

ESL writing instruction allocated into four states of approaches (the controlled approach, the current-traditional rhetoric approach, the process approach, and the social approach (Mu, 2005). The writing process has become the core in the ESL writing and the teachers assist the student's development in written drafts with feedback specified for further progress (Hemadevi et al., 2013). Writers regularly use the writing process in exploring and developing their ideas about the topic they interested in (Torrance, Thomas, and Robinson, 1994).

The findings of Mutar (2019), showed that while-writing strategies are the most

frequently used, followed by the pre-writing strategies, and finally revising strategies process by using the writing strategy inventory of (Petric and Czarl, 2003). It was also bringing into being those pre-writing strategies and revising strategies positively link with students' writing performance and those writing strategies as a whole have analytical influence for writing performance. Besides that, the other findings by Q. Mutar and Nimehchisalem (2017) shown that while writing strategies and revising writing strategies are the most frequently used strategies by participants whereas low strategy indicated the pre-writing strategies.

The findings of the previous study as presented indicated that low skill, as well as high skill students, similarly use writing strategies, and the transformation is unconnected which is reliable with some previous studies. The reason due to the lack of consistency of strategy use in the writing and the differences among the learners of language proficiency usage in their English academics. This also can help educate the consciousness of learners about the strategy-use by (Petric and Czarl, 2003). When ESL undergraduate writers tend to develop the writing strategies they will be more dynamic, simple and more effective with the right way of using writing strategy.

METHODOLOGY

Writing Strategy Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to classify the writing strategies utilized by the participants of this study. This instrument is first language processing with the items related to second language learners based on Flower and Hayes' cognitive model. The instrument was developed to survey the “self-reported writing strategies of a large number of non-native speakers of English who write in English for academic purposes” (Petri & Czár, 2003, p. 188). This instrument synchronized the research of this study as all participants were non-native speakers and they were English students who had to write in

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English for academic purposes courses. Reliably, this questionnaire was relevant to find out what strategies are useful and convenient for a writing task (Petri & Czarl, 2003). The research design relates to the data of decisions based on research questions of a study. Besides, the research design defines the validity and reliability of research questions by using the quantitative method.

Respondent

The sample size withdraws from ESL undergraduate students that comprise junior students. The data of this study is collected from the ESL undergraduate students of tertiary education (university). The size of the population is an important aspect to collect the sample size, the sample size around 30 to 500 would be suitable to acquire a reliable result (Delice, 2001). The questionnaire is distributed to ESL undergraduate students with a total of 50 students. The sample was drawn from the tertiary education of university students. The study focuses on students writing strategies use in their classroom. The students are undergraduate students (diploma level) and the age range includes (19-23 years old). The ESL undergraduate students are chosen as a sample of this study because the Malaysian students are less efficient in writing skills and they do not know how to complete the written task in an adequate way (Bani Younes & Salmah Albalawi, 2015). A close-ended questionnaire was distributed to the participants.

Instrument

Measurements for writing strategies were derived from (Petric and Czarl, 2003) and a close-ended questionnaire was drawn to gather information about the planning strategies while writing strategies and revising strategies. This measurement was selected because it was often utilized by previous researchers (Alkubaidi, 2014; Asmari, 2013). A five-point Likert scale where 1 corresponds to 'always true' was adopted for all the 44 items relating to the writing process. The questionnaire was directed in the student's classroom hall. The learners voluntarily filled

out the score for their writing process stages. They spent about 20 minutes and the questionnaire was delivered in English for every section. The following section explains the instruments of each variable in detail. The questionnaire consists of 44 items using three subsections of strategies as stated below and attached in appendix 1:

1. General questions (6 items)
2. Planning strategies (8 items) before I start writing an essay in English
3. While writing strategies (14 items) when writing in English
4. Revising strategies (16 items) when revising

Data Analysis

The reliability test for each subsection was conducted. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to examine writing strategies utilized by ESL undergraduate students in the writing class. Means and standard deviations were utilized to analyze the frequency use of each strategy in the writing process (planning strategies, while writing and revising strategies). Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine if there was any relationship between the learner's strategies uses in the writing process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

1. What are the student's preferred strategies of successful and unsuccessful ESL students in the writing process?

Table 1. Means and Standards Deviation of Learner's Frequency Strategies in Writing Process

	Age	Mean	SD
Planning strategies	19-23 years' old	4.2125	0.35378
While writing strategies	19-23 years' old	3.8417	0.02603

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Revising strategies	19-23 years' old	3.5167	0.36222
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The overall mean score of the three strategies of writing stated to be used by ESL students between the ages of 19 – 23 years old are shown in Table 1. The mean scores of the three subsections of writing strategies fell between 3.52 and 4.21 on a five-point Likert scale where 1 to 5, which were derived from (Petric and Czarl, 2003). However, the planning strategies 4.22 are slightly used more frequently than while writing strategies and revising strategies. The least use of strategies was while writing strategies 3.84 and revising strategies 3.52. Undergraduate learners between the age of 19-23 years old generally have a high level of planning strategies for the

writing process. As seen in the table above, the learner's overall mean score in the strategies of the writing process is similar and high. The learners frequently use planning strategies slightly more than while writing strategies and revising strategies. Findings of the previous studies (Alkubaidi, 2014; Alhaisoni, 2012) described that learners frequently using the planning strategies compared to while writing strategies and revising strategies. Furthermore, the result can be taken as a sign of planning strategies use frequently by the learners which indicates that these undergraduate ESL learners use planning strategies for writing process wisely compared to while writing strategies and revising strategies.

Figure 2. Representation of the Means and SDs of Three Strategies of the Writing Process

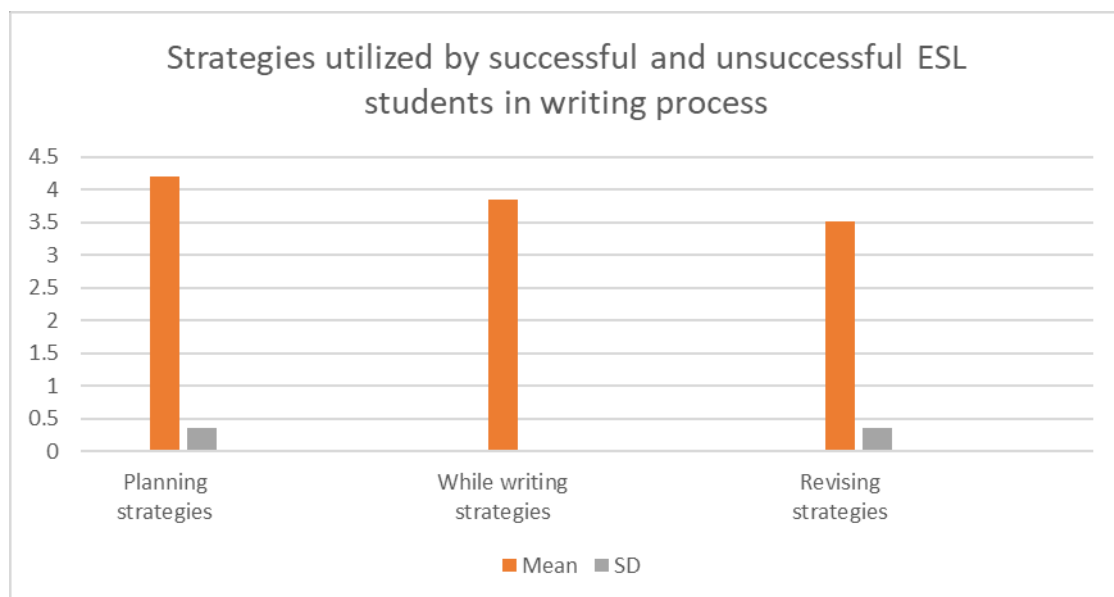


Figure 2. showed the comparison of strategies used by the undergraduate learners in the writing process. The mean of planning strategies shows the highest mean score of 4.21 followed by while writing strategies which is 3.84. The findings indicate the respondents agreed to the items in the questionnaire. On the other hand, the results show the revising strategies obtain the lowest

mean score of 3.51, this emphasizes that the majority of the respondents being neutral to the items listed in the questionnaire. The standard deviation of each strategy which comprises planning strategies 0.353, revising strategies 0.026 and revising strategies 0.362. The preferences of the students indicate they utilize the planning strategies frequently in their writing.

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CONCLUSION

The findings also showed the learners used various strategies such as mechanics of writing relating the task with experience, talk writing, freewriting, outlining, listing, online materials and seeking help and test arrangement of writing. Findings of the previous studies (Alkubaidi, 2014; Alhaisoni, 2012) described that learners frequently using the planning strategies compared to while writing strategies and revising strategies. Therefore, it has been proven that the findings of this study are consistent with the literature of previous studies. Further research is also recommended to find out why students are still having problems in writing and it is highly recommended that future researchers embark to address this issue.

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APPENDIX 1

There are five (4) sections in this questionnaire.

SECTION A: Demographic Respondent

The following questions are about your personal background.

INSTRUCTION: Please tick (✓) at the relevant answers.

1. Sex:

- ☐ 18-25 years old ☐ 26-33 years old ☐ 34-41 years' old
☐ 42-49 years old ☐ 50 years old and above

2. What is your native language?

3. How many years have you been studying English?

4. Did you attend a course in writing in English before coming to this school? Please circle. If yes, what was the main focus of the course?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No _____

5. What types of texts do you generally write in English. Please tick.

- ☐ e-mails ☐ letters ☐ notes ☐ essays ☐ articles ☐ reports ☐ research papers
☐ creative writing other: _____

6. Do you like writing in English? Please tick.

- ☐ I don't like it at all ☐ I don't like it ☐ I have no feelings about it ☐ I like it
☐ I like it a lot ☐ Why (not)

In this part, you will find statements about the different stages of writing in English: before writing, while writing, and when revising. Please read each statement and circle the number indicating how true of the statement is.

Never True (NT)	Usually Not True (UNT)	Somewhat True (ST)	Usually True (UT)	Always True (AT)
1	2	3	4	5

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SECTION B: Before I Start Writing an Essay in English

Please circle the appropriate number.

BEFORE I START WRITING AN ESSAY IN ENGLISH	NT 1	UNT 2	ST 3	UT 4	AT 5
1. I make a timetable for the writing process.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Before I start writing I revise the requirements.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I look at a model written by a native speaker or more proficient writer.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I start writing without having a written or mental plan.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I think about what I want to write and have a plan in my mind, but not on paper.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I note down words and short notes related to the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I write an outline of my paper.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I write notes or an outline in my native language.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: When Writing in English

Please circle the appropriate number.

WHEN WRITING IN ENGLISH	NT 1	UNT 2	ST 3	UT 4	AT 5
1. I start with the introduction.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I stop after each sentence to read it again.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I stop after a few sentences or a whole paragraph, covering one idea.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I reread what I have written to get ideas how to continue.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I go back to my outline and make changes in it.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I write bits of the text in my native language and then translate them into English.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I go for sure in grammar and vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I simplify what I want to write if I don't know how to express my thoughts in English.	1	2	3	4	5
9. If I don't know a word in English, I write it in my native language and later try to find an appropriate English word.	1	2	3	4	5
10. If I don't know a word in English, I find a similar English word that I know.	1	2	3	4	5
11. If I don't know a word in English, I stop writing and look up the word in the dictionary.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I use a bilingual dictionary.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I use monolingual dictionary.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I ask somebody to help out when I have problems while writing.	1	2	3	4	5

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SECTION D: When Revising

Please circle the appropriate number.

WHEN WRITING IN ENGLISH	NT 1	UNT 2	ST 3	UT 4	AT 5
1. I read my text aloud.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I only read what I have written when I have finished the whole paper.	1	2	3	4	5
3. When I have written my paper, I hand it in without reading it.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I use a dictionary when revising.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I make changes in vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I make changes in sentence structure.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I make changes in the structure of the essay.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I make changes in the content or ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I focus on one thing at a time when revising (e.g., content, structure).	1	2	3	4	5
10. I drop my first draft and start writing again.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I check if my essay matches the requirement.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I leave the text aside for a couple of days and then I can see it in a new perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I show my text to somebody and ask for his/her opinion.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I compare my paper with the essays written by my friends on the same topic.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I give myself a reward for completing the assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I check my mistakes after I get back the paper with feedback from the teacher, and try to learn from them.	1	2	3	4	5

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